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*Woman under Monasticism*: Chapters on Saint-Lore and Convent Life between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500. By LINA ECKENSTEIN. (Cambridge: University Press. 1896. Pp. xv, 494.)

IN view of the difficulty of compressing into a single volume the story of religious woman for a thousand years, the author has wisely limited the scope of her studies, for the most part, to Germany and England, and has called the work a series of chapters rather than a history. The historical part of the work begins in reality with the second chapter, which treats of monastic life among the Franks, since the earlier pages attempt to connect heathendom and Christianity through the tribal goddess and the woman saint by conjecture more than by evidence. Folk-lore and history both testify to the transfer of many heathen rites and conceptions into early Christianity, but it demands a painful stretch of the imagination to trace the Christian reverence of woman back to the time when tribal relations were determined by *Mutterrecht* rather than by descent through the father.

The first century of Frankish Christianity was its darkest period, for the conversion of these Germans was decidedly superficial, if we may judge by the doings of their rulers and the naïve statements of their historians. Yet a few bright lights appear. St. Radegunda of Poitiers and her poetic friend Fortunatus are familiar figures to the student of this period, but the character of the convent life of the time is not usually so well brought out as it is in the author's description of the revolt of the nuns of Poitiers, a few years after the death of Radegunda. For two years the sisters defied churchmen and laymen to place an undesired abbess over them. Independence of spirit does not seem to have been confined to men, even before the days of Brunhilda.

The history of convent life in England during the early Anglo-Saxon period is hardly more than a catalogue of foundations. Houses were established for women in abundance; but information as to the character of the life within is not easy to obtain. Whitby and Ely are seen to be centres of influence at certain times owing to the position and character of their abbesses, but it is difficult to make an account of the period interesting. One significant feature, however, should be noted in the fact that so many of the abbesses of the time were daughters of the royal families; and in this connection one may profitably compare the genealogical tables in Montalembert's chapter on Anglo-Saxon Nuns.

During the early part of the eighth century the literary powers of numerous English religious women were brought to light in their correspondence with Boniface, the missionary to Germany. To the historian's regret, these letters are so largely of an introspective, or devotional, character that they afford few glimpses of the life of the time. This friendship did lead, however, to the voluntary transfer of a number of Anglo-Saxon nuns into the German missionary field, and eventually they became prominent in ecclesiastical matters. Hence the transition is easy to an account of convents in Germany.

The Old Saxons were the last branch of the German race to accept Christianity, but seem to have developed at once a vigorous monastic life. The heads of convents here as elsewhere were usually of distinguished lineage, and the religious houses became the recognized centres of culture. Between the years 800 and 1000 this region produced numerous monuments of literature. Herford, Essen, Quedlinburg, and Gandersheim are particularly prominent as seats of learning and piety. To the latter place the author devotes considerable space, and still more to the most brilliant product of the Gandersheim convent, the Nun Hrotsvith (Roswitha, 932-1002?). Descriptions of her poems and legends are accompanied by copious extracts from her dramatic writings, which show that mediæval woman was also ready to attack the so-called social question of her day, though with loftiness of purpose and becoming modesty. Her contributions to history were considerable, but she is perhaps more interesting herself as a product of the age in which she lived.

The chapter on the monastic revival of the Middle Ages is a very compact account of the foundation of the many new orders which sprang up between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The details are dry, but are perhaps necessary to show the new careers opened to women, and to point out the motives which led to such a multiplication of denominations within the religious world.

A consideration of art industry in mediæval convents shows that women had many of the employments of men, even to the copying of manuscripts, but that they were particularly skilled in embroidery. The highest degree of excellence in all these branches was reached in the first half of the fourteenth century, after which there was a steady decline owing to the new industrial competition of the towns. In this connection the author gives considerable space to that remarkable character of the twelfth century, Herrad of Hohenburg, who compiled, copied, and illuminated with her own hand what may be called an encyclopædia of contemporary life. Her miniature work in this *Hortus Deliciarum* was the wonder of artists until the manuscript was destroyed in the siege of Strassburg, but one can hardly less admire her literary and educational conceptions.

The women chosen to represent the prophetic spirit in convent life are St. Hildegard of Bingen and St. Elizabeth of Schönau, both from the twelfth century. Among those conspicuous for philanthropy we see the familiar figures of Hedwig, patron saint of Silesia, and St. Elizabeth of Thuringia. A study of the contemplative side of religious life leads to a chapter on the mystic literature written particularly for women. In England attention is called to the poems of Thomas de Hales and the *Ancren Riwe* of disputed authorship. In Germany the convent of Helfta produced during the thirteenth century a body of mystic writings by women themselves, which maintained its influence for a long period. So different, however, is the spirit of that time from ours that it is difficult to take up the subject with sympathy.

Convent life in its internal and external relations is treated in interest-

ing chapters, which, though they reveal nothing new on the subject, throw needed light on other topics. The theoretical rules of conduct remained about the same for long periods, but every generation placed its own interpretation upon them. The author takes pains to refute the notion that monasteries were hotbeds of idolatry and superstition by saying that the ceremonials complained of by their critics were adopted by an earlier age for the very purpose of preserving the faith, and had that effect at the time. As educational centres convents retrograded as the occupations of the nuns became more exclusively devotional.

The decline and fall of mediæval monasticism is presented in chapters on the reforms attempted before the Reformation and on the dissolution in England. Visitations of nunneries do not begin with Henry VIII., for a critical attitude was apparent in the fourteenth century. The independence of monasteries was long fought by the bishops and was finally overruled. Evident evils were in process of correction before the violent interference of the Reformation. The author agrees with Gasquet that the dissolution in England was harshly and cruelly carried out, but does not accept the suggestion that the monastic property could have been successfully taken over by the reforming party and adapted to new uses, although in many cases this was done in Germany by converting the convent into a school or home for indigent women.

A picturesque *dénouement* is given to the book in a sketch of the Abbess Charitas Pirckheimer, sister of the humanist of the same name. She was not only an enlightened woman but of such vigorous character that she was able to keep at bay till the end the reforming party of Nuremberg. She was one of the last great "women under monasticism."

The book is a careful piece of historical work. It enters a field which has been much studied and brings forth no new results, but there is evidence of close contact with original sources, though one may differ here and there with conclusions drawn. The treatment is scientific as over against the legends of Mrs. Jameson, and cool as compared with the emotional periods of Montalembert. When woman is separated from the other religious life of the time the picture is incomplete, but the author has successfully depicted a series of characters who deserve remembrance.

J. M. VINCENT.

*Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk.* Door P. J. BLOK.  
(Groningen: J. B. Wolters. 1892-1896. Three vols., pp. 384, 580, 548.)

A FULL history of the Dutch people by a native master of materials and methods has long been a desideratum. To the matter supplied by the old annalists and folio-makers, vast stores have been added by scholars in various countries who have delved in the archives long since opened by the governments of Europe. Professor P. J. Blok, successor to the veteran Dr. R. Fruin, who was his teacher, in the chair of history at the University of